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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000173

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: DINK KILLING BRINGS DARK SIDE OF TRABZON INTO THE
LIGHT

REF: A. ANKARA 0144
[1](#)B. 06 ANKARA 522
[1](#)C. ISTANBUL 0038
[1](#)D. ISTANBUL 0044
[1](#)E. ISTANBUL 0042

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) Summary: Turkey's Black Sea town of Trabzon has come under the microscope since a 17 year-old local assassinated Turkish-Armenian human rights activist Hrant Dink on January [1](#)19. Dink's murder was the latest in a series of extremist attacks by youths connected to Trabzon, now accused by many of being a hotbed of ultranationalism. Others familiar with the city caution that focusing on Trabzon obscures the fact that virulent nationalism among Turkey's youth is a nationwide phenomenon. Stung by harsh criticism for failing to address the dangerous trend, the GOT in recent days has taken steps to look responsive: the governor and police chief were fired on January 26 and the Interior Ministry has launched an investigation into ultranationalist criminal rings. Whether the government will follow up with measures designed to encourage tolerance as election battles heat up remains to be seen. End summary.

Ultrnationalist Crimes Tied to Trabzon

2.(U) Following the arrest of a Trabzon youth alleged to have killed Dink, the Turkish press was quick to point out that the murder was tied to similar ultranationalist attacks that occurred in or emanated from Trabzon. On February 5, 2006, a 16 year-old Trabzon boy shot and killed an Italian priest Father Andrea Santoro (ref B). Yasin Hayal, the man who allegedly recruited and trained Dink's killer, had spent 11 months in jail for bombing Trabzon McDonald's in 2004, injuring four. In May 2005, four students distributing leaflets about prison conditions narrowly escaped death at the hands of a 2,000-strong lynch-mob. In 2005, a lynch-mob nearly killed two Kurdish teenagers who tried to burn the Turkish flag. In response to the Dink murder and the public outcry, the Interior Ministry assigned two officers to investigate the connection between these incidents and possible complicity of local police and government officials. The GOT announced on January 26 that Trabzon's governor and

police chief had been fired.

High Unemployment Fuels Extremist Youths In Trabzon

3.(SBU) Many contacts believe that these events demonstrate that Trabzon has become the center of nationalistic and anti-Western feeling in Turkey. Human Rights Association President Yusuf Alatas pointed out that the Trabzon youths involved in these crimes, once apprehended, openly admitted to the act and expressed nationalistic pride for what they had done. Some commentators noted that minors are often induced to commit the actual crime because they are subject to lower penalties than adults.

4.(C) Alatas listed several reasons to explain Trabzon's evolution into an "explosive hotbed of ultranationalism in Turkey." High unemployment, exacerbated by a crises in hazelnut production and urban migration from neighboring rural areas, a culture of violence including high gun ownership rates and an economy linked to criminal human-trafficking rings, and a reputation for hard-core nationalism to protect as "Turkish" what was once a center of the Greek Pontus state have fueled violent extremism. Alatas added that the Turkish National Police (TNP) and administrative structure are traditionally nationalistic and protect their ilk; and that local media stoke nationalist sentiments.

5.(C) Dr. Mehmet Bekaroglu, a former Refah Party MP from Trabzon who lived and taught there for 16 years, told us that heavy in-immigration from the countryside and ill-advised government policies had led to high unemployment, which,

added to spiraling crime, created an environment ripe for the exploitation of unemployed, impressionable youths. In 2006 alone, 3,500 local shopkeepers closed their businesses. One of the few outlets for Trabzon's youth are Internet cafes; the city's main street boasts over 68, where nationalist websites are reportedly scanned with fervor.

Focus on Trabzon Obscures Wider Problem

6.(C) Bekaroglu stressed that the media's focus on Trabzon oversimplifies what is really a nation-wide problem among Turkey's youth. Turks instinctively fear a potential fragmentation of the country, dating back to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, Bekaroglu noted. Today's youth are increasingly concerned with this issue because they are witnessing sectarian struggles in Iraq and Lebanon. Resentment over what they perceive as the EU applying a double standard to Turkey's accession process adds to their sense of being "victims", a sentiment further inflamed by the media. The result, according to Bekaroglu, is a class of youths throughout Turkey who are angry, unemployed and impressionable. These youngsters can easily be recruited by those who believe that through assassinations and other political crimes they are protecting the unity of the state.

7.(C) Comment: While nationalism among Turkish youths overall has climbed in recent years, the disproportionately high number of fanatical, ultranationalist crimes connected to Trabzon is hard to ignore. Intense media focus on Trabzon following Dink's assassination finally spurred the GOT to take steps that human rights activists had long encouraged to quell rising nationalism. Such measures are a positive start but may be a cosmetic response that fails to address the larger threat Turkey as a nation potentially faces from extremists. End comment.

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